

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
Speaker  
U. S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader  
U. S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

[VIA EMAIL]

December 16, 2017

Dear Speaker Ryan, Leader Pelosi, Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

We, the undersigned national, state and local organizations, are extremely troubled by the constant attacks perpetrated by this administration upon immigrants, refugees, Muslims and communities of color. We write today in support of our current family-based immigration system and diversity immigrant visa program, which has created the rich, vibrant and multicultural U.S. communities of today.

The White House has proposed to terminate our family-immigration system, the diversity visa program and severely limit the number of refugees allowed in the U.S. thereby reducing the annual number of immigrants granted lawful permanent residence in the U.S. by more than 50%. The proposal was first introduced in the RAISE Act, S.1720, filed by Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR) and has been repeatedly endorsed by the White House. A House companion bill, HR 3775, filed by Rep. Lamar Smith (R-VA). Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) also included slashing family immigration by 60% in their SECURE Act, S.2192, which contains a litany of problematic proposals.

On Monday, December 11th, the White House, and U.S. Attorney General Sessions used a failed attack in New York to malign our current family-based immigration system, calling it “chain migration” and the Attorney General brought up a previous New York violent attack to say that the diversity lottery should be ended. The Attorney General implied that immigrants who come to the U.S. through these programs are “gang members, fraudsters, drunk drivers, and child abusers,” and suggested adopting a proposal such as Senator Cotton’s proposal. These statements and many before them seek to vilify immigrants along with communities of color. There is no sound basis to argue that eliminating or changing these programs would make communities safer. It is disgraceful to use moments of tragedy to scapegoat immigrants and push for unrelated policy goals that would drastically harm immigrant communities.

Our current predominantly family-based immigration system was established by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (INA of 1965) to end the previous racist national origin quotas that began with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 which heavily favored immigrants from Northern and Western Europe.

Today, the vast majority of immigrants coming to the U.S. through the family-based system and diversity lottery are underrepresented people of color.

The over 43 million immigrants living in the U.S. are the backbone and multi-ethnic fibre of our communities giving our country competitive advantage while providing economic opportunities, freedom, safety and stability to many who need it most. In 2015, 20.7 million immigrants were naturalized citizens. The majority of these immigrants came through our family-based immigration system. Americans hold family in the highest regard. Labels such as “chain migration” and “merit-based” dismiss the “family” altogether. These labels also seek to mask the real goals of these policies which is to phase out the number of diverse immigrants granted permanent resident status and eventual citizenship.

Migration is fundamentally about people planting permanent roots in a new country and should take into account the human need to live with and care for one’s family. The family is the cornerstone of the community and the most fundamental institution in society. Family members step in to provide support in times of personal and economic hardship. Caretakers, who are predominantly women, spouses, mothers, grandmothers, and aunts, do often unpaid and undervalued work that enables their family members to work outside the home and contribute to our economy.

A person’s educational attainment is not the sole measure for the creativity, entrepreneurial spirit, or grit to open a small business or create innovation. Together, families buy homes and start businesses that create jobs. Many immigrant business owners came through our family-based immigration system. Immigrants started 28% of all new U.S. businesses in 2011, despite accounting for just 12.9% of the U.S. population.<sup>1</sup> Contrary to popular rhetoric, through the diversity visa program, the U.S. sees an integration of the brightest minds and their loved ones. In 2015, 37% of diversity visa recipients had professional or management-related occupations and 36% were students or children.<sup>2</sup>

While the economy is important, we should be careful not to create an immigration system that treats people like commodities. It is vital that the U.S. continues to be a safe haven for those seeking refuge from violence, persecution and fleeing poverty. We are offended by the notion that there are good immigrants and bad immigrants and further that only English-speaking, highly paid immigrants have value. Of equal concern is that a “merit-based system” will prioritize the immigration of men over women due to gender discrimination in other countries where women do not have equal opportunities.

The Immigration Act of 1990 was passed with significant bipartisan support and signed into law by President George H.W. Bush. This amendment prioritized family reunification by expanding the number of family-based visas allotted per year and creating the Diversity Visa Program which allowed for 50,000 permanent residency visas annually. The Diversity Visa Program, has become an integral pathway to lawful permanent residency as well as ensuring equitable migration from nations and regions with low migration

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<sup>1</sup> Open for Business: How Immigrants Are Driving Small Business Creation In The United States, <http://www.newamericaneconomy.org/research/open-for-business-how-immigrants-are-driving-small-business-creation-in-the-united-states-2/>

<sup>2</sup> American Immigration Council - The Diversity Immigrant Visa Program: An Overview <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/diversity-immigrant-visa-program-overview>

rates to the U.S. In FY 2014, 22,703 Africans, 8,500 Asians, and 1,474 people from Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>3</sup> were admitted into the U.S. as part of the yearly allotment of Diversity Visas.

Many thriving and diverse communities in the U.S. would not exist but for the INA of 1965 and the Immigration Act of 1990. We value diversity and inclusion and we know that immigrants and refugees make America better. We urge you not to give into far right, nativist approaches to immigration and to oppose proposals to cut legal immigration in general, and family-based visas and diversity visas in particular. Instead of focusing on dismantling what actually works about our immigration system, Congress should focus on positive solutions such as passing a clean DREAM Act, which has bipartisan support. Sincerely,

Asian Americans Advancing Justice

Advancing Justice | AAJC

Advancing Justice | ALC

Advancing Justice | Atlanta

Advancing Justice | Chicago

Advancing Justice | LA

Black Alliance for Just Immigration

National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)

The Undocublack Network

### **National Organizations**

African American Ministers In Action

Alianza Americas

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO

Center for Popular Democracy

Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, Inc. (CDM)

Church World Service

Daily Kos

Demos

Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC)

Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM)

Franciscan Action Network

Friends Committee on National Legislation (Quakers)

Hispanic Federation

Immigrant Defense Project

Immigrant Legal Resource Center

Japanese American Citizens League

Jobs With Justice

Latino Victory Project

League of United Latin American Citizens

Mi Familia Vota

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<sup>3</sup> US Department of State Immigrant Number Use for Visa Issuances and Adjustments of Status in the Diversity Immigrant Category Fiscal Years 2005-2014

<https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/AnnualReports/FY2014AnnualReport/FY14AnnualReport-TableVII.pdf>

MomsRising  
MoveOn.org, Civic Action  
NAACP  
NAFSA: Association of International Educators  
National Action Network  
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)  
National Center for Lesbian Rights  
National Center for Transgender Equality  
National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development (CAPACD)  
National Federation of Filipino American Associations  
National Immigrant Justice Center  
National Immigration Law Center  
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health  
OCA Asian Pacific American Advocates  
Refugee and Immigration Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Institute Justice Team  
Sisters of Saint Francis  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)  
Southern Border Communities Coalition  
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
Third Order, Society of St. Francis  
UFW Foundation  
UNITE HERE  
UnidosUS  
United We Dream  
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee  
Voto Latino  
We Belong Together  
YWCA USA

### **State & Local Organizations**

African Coalition (CA)  
Alliance of Filipinos for Immigrant Rights and Empowerment (IL)  
APIENC (API Equality - Northern California)  
Arizona Asian & Pacific Islander American Vote Table  
Arkansas United Community Coalition  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Chicago  
Asian Law Alliance (CA)  
Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center (DC)  
Asian Services In Action, Inc. (OH)  
Black Immigrant Collective (MN)  
California Asian Pacific Chamber of Commerce (CA)  
CASA (MD, PA, VA)  
Chinese for Affirmative Action (CA)  
Chinese Mutual Aid Association (IL)  
Chula Vista Partners in Courage (CA)  
Clinica Monseñor Oscar A. Romero (CA)  
Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community (IL)

CT Shoreline Indivisible  
Dolores Street Community Services (CA)  
Equality California (CA)  
Florida Immigrant Coalition (FL)  
HANA Center (IL)  
Healthy House Within a MATCH Coalition (CA)  
IEIYC (Inland Empire Immigrant Youth Collective) (CA)  
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights  
Indo-American Center (IL)  
Japanese American Citizens League, Arizona Chapter  
Japanese American Service Committee (IL)  
Korean Resource Center (CA)  
Korean Resource Center (KRC) (CA)  
Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA) (CA)  
Little Tokyo Service Center (CA)  
Loyola Immigrant Justice Clinic (CA)  
Many Languages One Voice (DC)  
Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project (CA)  
NaFFAA (NV)  
New Mexico Faith Coalition for Immigrant Justice  
New Voice Immigration Assistance Services (CA)  
New York Immigration Coalition  
OCA-Greater Houston (TX)  
Ohio Progressive Asian Women's Leadership  
OneAmerica (WA)  
PLUMAS at VCU (VA)  
Priority Africa Network (CA)  
Refugee and Immigrant Center for Legal and Educational Services (TX)  
San Bernardino Community Service Center, Inc. (CA)  
Services, Immigrant Rights, and Education Network (SIREN) (CA)  
Sisters of St. Francis Justice, Peace and Integrity for Creation Committee (PA)  
South Asian Network (SAN) (CA)  
South Bay People Power (CA)  
The Jus Semper Global Alliance (CA)  
Vietnamese Association of Illinois (IL)  
Virginia Organizing (VA)  
WeCount! (FL)  
Women Watch Afrika, Inc. (GA)